



Northeastern Illinois PUBLIC TRANSIT *Task Force*

December 12, 2013 Meeting Summary

Michael A. Bilandic Building
160 N. LaSalle Street, Room N-505
Chicago, IL 60601
1:00 p.m.

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Meeting Summary

The Northeastern Illinois Public Transit Task Force (NEIL PTTF) came together for their sixth full task force meeting on December 12, 2013. Co-Chairs Ann Schneider and George Ranney began the meeting as usual with roll call of task force participants as well as the introduction of invited guests. Of the 15 appointed task force members, 13 were able to attend the meeting. Two transit experts, Mort Downey and Tom Prendergast were invited to provide important insights to task force members on their many years of service in the transportation industry, specifically transit. Additionally, the northeastern Illinois appointing authorities were invited to provide written and/or public testimony to the task force and citizens in attendance.

Meeting Attendees

NEIL PTTF Members	Special Guests
Ann Schneider, Co-Chairperson/Secretary	Tom Prendergast, Chairman, MTA New York
George Ranney, Co-Chairperson	Mort Downey III, Board of Directors, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Carole Brown	Dan Cronin, Chairman, DuPage County
Patrick Fitzgerald	Tina Hill, Chairwoman, McHenry County
Robert Guy	Aaron Lawlor, Chairman, Lake County
Dr. Adrienne Holloway	Larry Walsh, Executive, Will County
Nick Palmer	John Yonan (for Toni Preckwinkle), P.E. Superintendent, Cook County
Tony Paulauski	
Raul Raymundo	
Robert Reiter	
Kathryn Tholin	
Dr. Ashish Sen	
Donald Tantillo	

Following roll call, Secretary Schneider provided a brief overview of housekeeping items such as public comment procedures and the tools made available on the web. In accordance with the agenda, the next order of business was the approval of the November 22, 2013 meeting minutes. The task force approved the minutes with a unanimous vote. Next, the upcoming full task force schedule was discussed. It was stated that per request from the co-chairs, an extension will be provided, by the Governor, to the task force allowing work to continue until March 31, 2014. On or before this date, the task force will be required to submit detailed recommendations for improving the region's transit system. The original due date was January 31, 2014. Additionally, the task force was told that they will be provided a

technical memorandum to assist with the formulation of the recommendations. This memo will be distributed prior to the January 14 task force meeting. The task force also plans to hold a full task force meeting on January 27, a final meeting in March, and potentially one or two additional meetings in-between.

Subsequent to the discussion on the schedule, the co-chairs recognized that the goal of the meeting was to continue the robust and productive dialogue that began at the November 22 meeting regarding a world class transit system. They acknowledged the meeting guests and opened the floor to the appointing authorities for their introductions.

Discussion with Appointing Authorities

Dan Cronin, Tina Hill, Aaron Lawlor, Larry Walsh, and John Yonan (for Toni Preckwinkle) introduced themselves and provided opening remarks to the task force and public attendees. Generally, the appointing authorities or their representatives emphasized the dire importance of restoring public confidence in northeastern Illinois mass transit agencies. In order for this restoration to occur, the region needs to better align the roles and responsibilities of the agencies, including accountability, ethics, agency oversight, and prosecuting violations.

Chairman Aaron Lawlor expressed that in Lake County, they have taken action to improve public trust, transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility. For example, the County Board enhanced its ethics ordinance beyond what is required by Illinois law. County board members and appointed officials are prohibited from using their position to influence in any way, hiring or procurement decisions. The ordinance imposes penalties for violations and provides the State's Attorney's office with the authority to conduct investigations and prosecute violations.

Mr. John Yonan (attending on behalf of Cook County President, Tony Preckwinkle) expressed concerns about the recent events in the area of mass transit in Illinois. Mr. Yonan emphasized the importance of the task force's mission to restore public confidence in the mass transit agencies in Illinois. He spoke of much needed review, oversight, and accountability, and emphasized that there is currently far too little accountability from the current board members of the RTA and the service boards. Additionally, it was indicated that it is the elected officials who hold appointing authority, such as President Preckwinkle, who are accountable to the voters for the performance or non-performance of their appointees to the mass transit boards. Currently there is no mechanism to transfer that accountability to the board members via removal. It was suggested that the creation of such a removal mechanism should be considered, so long as it is conditioned on incompetence, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office by the board members and further crafted to ensure removal powers cannot be abused for political or other reasons. Additionally, Carole Brown and Chairman Daniel Cronin discussed power potentially needed in a new RTA structure. Chairman Cronin also discussed his concerns regarding duplication of services, setting up a governing model that restores faith in the current system. Desires to increase ridership in light of decreasing funding were also discussed.

World-Class Transit Discussion

The task force and guest conversation transitioned to a discussion of world class transit, including how the northeastern Illinois public transit system compares to others, such as the MTA in New York. Guest,

Tom Prendergast spoke about the MTA, which was created in 1965 by New York State law. It's responsible for developing and implementing a mass transportation policy in the New York Metropolitan region. Its structure consists of a chairman, sixteen other voting members, two non-voting members, and four alternate, non-voting members.

Non-voting members are recommended by MTA customer groups and labor organizations, ensuring that these groups have a voice in board meetings, and in the direction of the organization. [Voting members are appointed by the governor as follows:](#)

- Four are recommended by New York City's Mayor;
- One each is recommended by the county executive from each of the seven New York State Counties served outside of the city
- Five are recommended by the governor alone

Mr. Prendergast explained that this governance model ensures that no one region dominates the MTA Board, and that there is a significant suburban presence. This enables the MTA to function as a truly regional transportation agency, setting a unified transportation policy for the entire MTA service territory. The MTA's governance structure requires transparency and accountability. The appointment of all MTA Board members is confirmed by the State Senate. The Board's committees covering each of New York's agencies, as well as Finance, the Capital Program, Audit, and other areas also hold regularly scheduled monthly meetings, open to the public and press. Tom noted that this governance model has allowed the MTA to achieve great things for New York.

The MTA's Capital program was created in 1983, and has invested nearly \$90 billion dollars through the program. The Capital Program has also helped improve the transit system by funding the expansion of NYC's network through, the Second Avenue Subway and the East Side Access, bringing the Long Island Railroad directly into grand central Terminal.

Mr. Prendergast believes the substantial capital investment is one of the main reasons the MTA is attracting record ridership levels today. The ability to raise capital funding to support a unified, regional transportation network has historically been a huge benefit. But funding for their operations is constantly a challenge. Fare revenue makes up only a portion of the costs needed to run the system. In MTA's case, it is about 50 percent, so they face questions on how to make up the difference. One way, is MTA bridges and tunnels, which serves nearly 300 million vehicles a year.

Task Force members had a number of follow up questions and comments regarding Illinois transit, and how it compares to New York. Among commonalities mentioned, there is a strong city core, symbiotic relationship between the city and suburbs, and as demographics change, people are commuting more. Mr. Prendergast noted that the catalysts for improving the system in New York included crime, derailments, and the business community threatening to relocate if the system wasn't fixed. Discussion turned to how ADA services should be evaluated, and how to accommodate visitors from outside the area. Mr. Prendergast explained that MTA evaluated how to get people to where they needed to go without door to door service; using linked trips along with equipping 100 key stations with the

appropriate access. Paratransit riders are also eligible for a free metro card, which encourages use of the existing network.

Mr. Prendergast also made comments about MTA's capital program and budgeting process. He noted that capital program budgets take into account state of good repair and demographic needs, and the review and approval process is very systematic and transparent.

General Discussion

Mort Downey III spoke about with the need for cooperation and a basis of support from a wide variety of stakeholders in order to make effective changes. Mr. Prendergast added that changes are not likely to be accomplished in one swoop, and that relationships must be built on trust. He emphasized that the MTA's budget built in small fare increases every couple of years to build predictability and not lurch from year to year. He said real estate is not a great funding source. However, if when MTA did experience spikes in real estate revenue, they would use this for non-recurring costs. Generally speaking, MTA keeps funding and spending aligned: capital with capital, operating with operating, non-recurring with non-recurring and recurring with recurring.

Public Comment

Two citizens made public comments to the task force and guests. John Plant indicated that he has looked at the group's interim report and has listened to comments. He posed several questions directed at Mr. Prendergast including questioning whether or not MTA was still in debt and if they have addressed state of good repair for their transit system. Mr. Prendergast explained that state of good repair is always part of MTA's planning process. Mr. Plant expressed that northeastern Illinois has a unique situation with the infrastructure being utilized and shared for public transit and freight. He also warned of adopting a large models like New York, because with increasing size comes increasing responsibilities. . Mr. Plant said the current system cannot economize enough to generate needed revenue, and other systems have found revenue due to crisis situations. He encouraged the group to craft a program for the area, and noted that the fact that we have three separate service boards does not mean we cannot do the greater good for the region.

The second public speaker, Mr. Garland Armstrong, noted that he used to live in New York. He asked what percent of transit service at MTA could accommodate ADA. Mr. Prendergast responded that the bus fleet is 100 percent accessible to wheelchairs, and that about 82 stations were accessible.

Adjournment

Co-Chairs Schneider and Ranney thanked the public for their comments, again thanked the meeting participants for their great discussion and interest in northeastern Illinois' public transit system, and adjourned the meeting.